

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON (MS-2), BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 3307, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ACQUIRE THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE PEMBERTON'S HEADQUARTERS AND TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK TO INCLUDE THAT PROPERTY

**APRIL 11, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to present my views on H.R. 3307, which would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to acquire the property known as the Pemberton's Headquarters and to modify the boundary of the Vicksburg National Military Park to allow for the inclusion of that property.

In 1895, Union and Confederate veterans organized the Vicksburg National Military Park Association to petition Congress to establish a national military park at Vicksburg comparable to those previously established at Chickamauga/Chattanooga, Antietam, Shiloh, and Gettysburg. These veterans of the Siege of Vicksburg recommended that the headquarters of both Union Major General Ulysses S. Grant and Confederate Lt. General John C. Pemberton be included in the park. However, when Congress enacted the legislation establishing the park in 1899, it simply charged park commissioners to "mark with historical tablets...the headquarters of General Grant and of General Pemberton."

It is important to note that, when the enabling legislation was passed, the building that had served as General Pemberton's headquarters was a private residence, lived in by respective citizens. As Congress at that time was reluctant to condemn property with private housing on it for public use, Pemberton's headquarters, located in the heart of the city's historic district, was excluded from the park. However, the site of Grant's headquarters, located in the proximity to the Union siege lines around Vicksburg, was incorporated into the park.

In 1990, new legislation (P.L. 101-442) charged Vicksburg National Military Park "to interpret the campaign and siege of Vicksburg from April 1862 to July 4, 1863, and the history of Vicksburg under the Union occupation during the Civil War and Reconstruction." Thus, the park finds itself today with its interpretive mission greatly expanded, but without the facilities and means to fulfill this legislated mandate. Acquisition of Pemberton's Headquarters would provide the park with the facilities it needs to allow it to address this expanded mandate and, at the same time, to finally fulfill the desire of veterans themselves who sought to include the building within the park.

Pemberton's Headquarters is a registered National Landmark. Its location next to the Balfour House, which served as headquarters for the Union occupation forces, and only four blocks from the historic Warren County Courthouse where military administration of the occupied city was conducted through Reconstruction, makes the Pemberton House ideally situated for the park to address its expanded interpretive mandate. It is also centrally located for National Park Service to administer its outlying park units in and around Vicksburg.

Its current owner has recently restored the building and, should the National Park Service acquire it, will need only minimal restoration for historical accuracy.

My understanding is that a preliminary interpretive plan has been developed by the staff at Vicksburg

National Military Park which proposes developing such interpretive themes as: "The Military Significance of Vicksburg During the Civil War," "Construction of Confederate Fortifications," "Citizens Under Siege," "The Role of Blacks and Black Troops in the Siege and Defense of Vicksburg," "Surrender of Vicksburg," "Military Occupation of Vicksburg," "Reconstruction in Vicksburg," and "Work of the Freedom's Bureau." Walking tours could also be conducted from Pemberton's Headquarters to other historical sites, many of which have African-American significance, throughout downtown Vicksburg.

Both the Vicksburg Riverfront and the Cultural Landscape Study issued by the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (1982) and the Chadbourne Study (1993) cite the need for the linkage between the Vicksburg National Military Park and the historic district as a means of enhancing economic development of the downtown area. Acquisition of Pemberton's Headquarters by the National Park Service would have significant economic impact on the City of Vicksburg. The park currently attracts up to 1.2 million visitors a year, most of who do not venture into the city's downtown historic district where they can visit museums, antebellum tour homes, shops, restaurants, and hotels. This will spur economic development and create new jobs in an array of businesses that hire mainly minorities employees.

Acquisition of Pemberton's Headquarters by the National Park Service has long been the desire of the Mayor and Board of Alderman of Vicksburg and the Warren County Board of Supervisors and the State Historic Preservation Office, who is represented here today by Kenneth H. P'Pool Deputy State Preservation Officer for Mississippi and Director of the Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The Honorable Robert M. Walker, former Mayor of Vicksburg, voiced his strong interest in the National Park Service acquiring the Pemberton's Headquarters, that it may serve as the catalysis for the establishment of a United States Colored Troops National Research Center in the nearby Southern Heritage Cultural Center. The current mayor, the Honorable Laurence Lyeen supports this idea as well. In addition to this, H.R. 3307 has the support of the entire Mississippi Congressional Delegation.

The interest of Vicksburg/Warren County as well as those of the nation would be well served in the acquisition, restoration, and operation of the Pemberton's Headquarters by the National Park Service.

Mr. Chariman, in closing, it is important to note that the funds necessary to facilitate the start of this project, the acquisition and minimum restoration, have already been appropriated in the Fiscal Year 2002 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (House Report 107-234). Under last year's act, \$500,000 was dedicated to this project and it is my understanding that modest future funds will be required to complete the restoration and to cover annual maintaining and operating cost.

Again Mr. Chairman, I urge the Committee to support H.R. 3307. That concludes my statement.

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